

ARE YOU ZEALOUS FOR RELIGION BUT LUKEWARM TOWARD GOD ? –*Religious rituals or sincere faith?*

Rites and traditions help human communities to hold on to their roots and give them a sense of belonging.

But rituals are like all human realities: they can be misused or practised as a meaningless routine or because they provide a certain emotional satisfaction. For example, some people insist on having a religious wedding ceremony even though they do not believe in God.

The greatest danger of religious rituals is placing one's faith in the ritual rather than in God, and attaching more importance to the ritual than to the spiritual. It is assumed that if the ritual is performed according to the rules, with the appropriate gestures and words, one can influence God to act in their favor and grant them what they desire.

But the ritual is only valuable if those who perform it do so with a pure heart towards God, in a spiritual attitude of faith and obedience. We cannot force His hand, or compel Him to act by performing this or that gesture or pronouncing this or that formula.

« *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.* »
(James 1:27)

God does not emphasise religious rituals but rather a righteous life and compassion : helping those in need and keeping oneself from being polluted by the world – that is, having a righteous and virtuous character. “Pure and spotless” does not mean being perfect, but striving every day to do what is pleasing in God's sight.

The Lord warns us very seriously against the dangers of mere outward observance of rites and rituals, and He condemns all hypocrisy. « *You hypocrites ! The prophet Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ‘These people honour Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me.’* » (Matthew 15:7)

All religious rituals are meaningless if you don't have love for God AND for your neighbour. That is true spirituality, true religion. God does not seek surface religiosity, but a transformation of the heart

Rites are not at the heart of the divine message, yet some believers cling to them rigidly, more than they are attached to God. A man can perform all the rituals and still remain selfish, dishonest and cruel, without mercy or compassion. He can recite prayers mechanically, but they are empty, having no effect on his life.

What is the value of outward observance if the heart remains unchanged, if we forget the very essence of faith: love, justice, mercy ?

On Judgement Day, we will be judged not by how zealously we observed religious observances, but by how much we loved God and others.

Where do you stand ?